

VZCZCXRO0315
RR RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHDBU RUEHLH RUEHNEH RUEHPW
DE RUEHCI #0055 0640915
ZNR UUUUU
R 050915Z MAR 09
FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS KOLKATA 000055

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR OES/PCI, OES/IHB, SCA/INS (GHORI), SCA/R (MAZZONE)
STATE FOR STAS AND AIAG (REED-ROWE)
STATE PASS TO NSF FOR INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS
STATE PASS TO USAID (CARROLL/CLEMENTS)
HHS FOR NIH/FIC (GLASS/MAMPILLY/HANDLEY)
HHS FOR FDA (LUMPKIN/VALDEZ)
HHS PASS TO OGHA (CUMMINGS/KULIKOUSKI)
HHS FOR CDC (BLOUNT/COX)
USDA FOR APHIS (FLEMING/BURLESON)
USDA FOR FAS (RIKER/BEAN)
NEW DELHI FOR FAS/APHIS
BANGKOK FOR USAID/RDMA/OPH (MACARTHUR)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [SENV](#) [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [AMED](#) [KFLU](#) [IN](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: NEW AVIAN INFLUENZA OUTBREAK IN WEST BENGAL - A CROSS BORDER CONNECTION?

REF: KOLKATA 2

11. (U) On February 24, the GOI reported a second outbreak of the avian influenza (AI) virus H5N1 in backyard poultry in West Bengal's Darjeeling district, this time in the forest village of Punding (See Reftel). The village is about 630 km north of Kolkata and the district physically borders the countries of Nepal and Bangladesh. The state's Principal Secretary for Animal Resources Department told PolFSN that the Rapid Response Teams have completed the culling of 3,000 birds and mopping and sanitizing operations in the village and surrounding 3 kilometer radius.

12. (SBU) The Principal Secretary expressed concern that the infection was "turning out to be endemic" and blamed lax surveillance in Bangladesh for the problem. According to him, the GOI had considered setting up a five kilometer wide poultry-free zone along the 4,000 kilometer India-Bangladesh border, but dismissed it because of resource constraints, the lack of alternative livelihoods and the inability to prevent birds from "contaminating the sanitized area."

13. (SBU) On February 26, Poloff met with representatives from the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization from Kathmandu and New Delhi, who are currently working on two USAID-sponsored cross-border avian influenza projects. One project focuses on the migratory bird surveillance, tracking the route of migratory birds to examine whether they may be contributing to the spread of AI (The bird tracking is available on the Internet at <http://www.werc.usgs.gov/sattrack/india/index.html>). The second project analyzes the poultry supply chain between India-Bangladesh and India-Nepal. FAO has identified six unofficial "priority routes" for poultry movement to help determine whether cross border poultry trade is a factor in the spread of AI. The projects began at the close of 2008 and results are expected in the latter part of this year.

Comment

14. (U) West Bengal continues to have sporadic AI outbreaks during what is now being referred to as the "winter AI season"; however, once identified, they have been able to effectively contain the outbreaks. Post has not seen any conclusive data that establishes the source of the continued outbreaks. Both FAO and West Bengal working-level officials agree that AI is a regional concern and must be addressed with all of the countries in the region (Nepal, India and Bangladesh). Post has encouraged FAO to consider the city of Kolkata as a venue for any regional meeting since Kolkata is the largest city in the region and West Bengal, as an affected state, has a vested interest in, and desire to, address the issue. The USG would benefit from continuing to encourage bilateral, regional and international partners to focus on adopting a regional approach to AI management, focusing specifically on areas such as a regional mapping of AI outbreaks, promoting regional AI testing facilities and cross-border AI identification projects.

PAYNE